

WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD

the Third Session of the Eighteenth Synod and a general meeting of the WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED

St Michael's Church, Norton, Stourbridge
on Monday 27 June 2022

Opening prayers were led by Andrew Sillis, Associate Priest of Norton and Wollaston and Assistant Area Dean of Greater Dudley.



David Nicholl, Greater Dudley Deanery, asked a **question under Standing Order 71:**

I have encountered at least two examples of married couples who are not allowed to serve on the same school governing body, is this correct? If this is the case on what grounds can such a ruling be made?



Tim Reid, Diocesan Director of Education responded on behalf of the DBE:

One of the key responsibilities of the DBE is to promote effective governance in our church schools. This is essential when it comes to Ofsted and SIAMS inspections where the effectiveness of governance is a key part of the assessment when making a judgement about the overall leadership of the school. On the 4 July 2019 the DBE made the decision that 'Those who have

immediate family members (e.g. spouse, parent, child) on the school's Board cannot be appointed as a DBE foundation governor for that school, but are welcome to offer themselves as a foundation governor at another church school'.

This decision was taken after the board explored the potential for an imbalance of influence and conflicts of interest adversely impacting effective governance. This could be particularly acute within small boards or boards with significant vacancies where the percentage of representation of one family could be greater than 20%. Given that boards often have sub-committees and a statutory need for independent panels (for instance complaints or appeals) the board could be vulnerable to accusations of breach of confidentiality. Following a detailed and lengthy discussion, the DBE unanimously agreed that the appointment of immediate family members as governors could potentially lead to a conflict of interest and therefore concluded that within its appointment power it was not best practice to appoint a DBE Foundation Governor where an immediate family member is currently serving on that board.

In response to David Nichol's supplementary question – *Is the diocese happy to appear to be discriminating on the basis of marriage. There are many other areas where husbands and wives serve together* – Tim responded that it is down to the size of the governing body. There are other schools which would appreciate people to serve as governors.

Bishop John gave his **Presidential Address**, reflecting on his recent cycling pilgrimage and re-committing to the diocesan Kingdom People Vision. He highlighted some of the unexpected events which have happened over the last few years - Covid, the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis, all of which make developing a strategy difficult, but it's still important to have a vision.



Bishop John commented that there are important issues which we need to reflect upon and make decisions about, but as Christians we also need to take time to sit and be with God, fully enjoying the present moment before we move forward into his future, which is often unknown.



Geoff Sansome from the parish of Claines and St George in Worcester opened a discussion about **how churches can support families from Ukraine** by giving some background to the country where he worked for a number of years. He explained that there was no matching of families happening through the Homes for Ukraine scheme – all the links are being made through personal contacts. 55,000 people have arrived in the UK through the Homes for Ukraine scheme and another 27,000 have arrived through the families' scheme for people who already have family here. 2% of all Ukrainian refugees have made it to the UK.

Many Ukrainians are coming here to ensure their children can be educated. It is mainly women and children who are arriving and they are often sending money back to family who remain in Ukraine. Refugees often experience considerable feelings of guilt because they have been able to leave. There have also been some cultural difference between the Ukrainians and their host families.

There is lots of great work being done by churches, but there is still more to be done. More hosts are needed and if church members are registered with Homes for Ukraine, they are encouraged to get in touch with a local community group to find a contact. If can't offer your home, offer to take a family out for the day to give their hosts some respite.

Practical things are useful such as clothing and bicycles. Pop-up cafes in churches have worked well, where Ukrainians and their hosts are invited to a social event. Most families are desperate to work, so please highlight any employment opportunities. Childcare is also an issue and will be more so over the summer holidays. Churches who already have DBS checked volunteers are perfectly placed to set something up.



Geoff reported that there seems to be no long-term planning as to what will happen next. At the moment hosts committed for six months, or possibly up to a year, but it is not clear what will happen then. There is a tension between wanting to return to the Ukraine and the rest of the family being able to join them here in the UK.

Synod had a time of discussion around this issue. A number of points were raised included ensuring that churches also support those asylum seekers from other parts of the world who are living here under very different conditions.



Bishop Martin presented a proposed **statement on modern Slavery**, reminding synod that there are still slaves in our society. [Read the full statement here.](#) There was a chance for debate with others offering questions and comments, asking what due diligence has already been done in this area and what support is available to parishes (visit the Clewer Initiative for more information & support).

Bishop Martin moved:

"That this Synod approves the statement on Modern Slavery, and commends this to parishes as a model for reapplication."

This was passed unanimously.

The meeting switched to become the **Annual General meeting of the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance**.



Andy Todd, Chair of the DBF presented the 2021 annual report and accounts. [View his slides.](#)

Andy explained that Parish Share receipts for 2021 were £4.244m. This was better than expected but was less than 2020 and was considerably down on 2019 figures. However, because share payments held up so well and the diocesan team managed to reduce expenditure, there was a small surplus in the 2021 accounts of £269,000 – essentially a break-even position. This was remarkable and it is thanks to the efforts of parishes in paying as much share as they were able to.

The DBF's investments also did well in 2021 and £1,015k of income from investments was able to be used to directly support parishes through contributing to parish share.

Out of total reserves of £80.5m, all but £5.7m has very specific requirements attached and can't be used for our core operations, and even some of the £5.7m is committed to things like the diocesan retreat house, Holland House. However, in 2021 we were able to free up £2.5m to set up the Healthier Churches Fund to support parishes in mission and ministry.

2022 will be a key year in the transition to the Ministry Share system and the year is already looking very challenging. Planned giving continues to be very important; please encourage as many people as possible to give through the Parish Giving scheme. The diocesan team continues to keep on top of costs and liquidity.



Thank you to Helen Archer-Smith as Director of Finance, to the budget holders and wider finance team. Also to John Preston and deputy Chair of the DBF, Eric Wiles for all they've done to steer us through turbulent waters. And to all in the parishes for all you continue to do to ensure Share is paid.

Synod had the opportunity for synod to ask questions on the budget. As part of this Bishop Martin expressed thanks to Andy for his work as Chair of the DBF. On behalf of the Bishop's Council and Standing Committee in their capacity as the Directors of the DBF, the Chair of the DBF moved the following resolution:

"That the Annual Report and Accounts for 2021 of The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited be received."

This resolution was passed.



The meeting reverted back to a meeting of the **Worcester Diocesan Synod**.

Nikki Groarke, Archdeacon of Dudley updated Synod on our **transformation agenda**, particularly on the Open Conversations and Mission Accompaniers.

She introduced some of the new Mission Accompaniers by showing synod a 'meet our Mission Accompaniers' film ([watch it on this page](#)) and encouraged more parishes to access this support. She also acknowledged that the latest Open Conversations haven't been as well attended as we'd hoped, so there are still lots of parishes who are unaware of the support and resources available to them. Nikki concluded by asking synod what the barriers might be to parishes accessing this offer and there was an opportunity for members to feedback their thoughts.



A number of people offered feedback on their perception of the Mission Accompaniers – some of whom had already been paired with someone and others who were waiting for the right time. Nikki explained that significant time and prayer goes into matching Accompaniers with parishes. Bishop John expressed his thanks to Nikki for her work on this.

Deputy Diocesan Secretary, Rob Quarton updated synod on progress towards our ambition to be a **net zero carbon diocese** by 2030. He started by saying that this is a very daunting task and we are using this year to plan how we're going to get there – starting slowly so we can move more quickly later. We are also using the Church of England's strategy to make sure we are on the right track. He encouraged more people to join the Climate Crisis Task Group and to get involved in helping us progress towards net zero. Synod had the opportunity to ask questions.



Director of Education, Tim Reid, updated Synod on the implications of the recent **White Paper on academisation**. By 2030, the Government would like all schools to be in a multi-academy trust and those trusts will be much bigger than those we have today – each will have around 7,000 pupils (which means that those academies which are currently standalone will need to move into a multi-academy trust). There are concerns around small rural schools, but there have been assurances that there won't be a push to close those schools and there will be support for them to academise. The Diocesan Board of Education is putting together a new strategy to support all our church schools in this process. 40 of our 100 schools are currently academised.

Bishop John closed the meeting with prayers.

The next meeting of diocesan synod will be held on Monday 7 November, 7pm. Synod voted that the meeting would be on Zoom (Spring and Summer synods will remain in person).

